It is well established that building home-school partnerships is a powerful avenue for increasing the satisfaction of parents and the community with schooling and for improving schools (Bauch, 1989; Comer, 1986; Epstein, 1992; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Henderson & Berla, 1994). When parents and teachers have rich and frequent communication, they can forge the partnerships that produce benefits for children. Additionally, as the discourse between homes and schools increases, understanding improves, suggestions are shared, and positive attitudes are more easily maintained (Ames, Khoju, & Watkins, 1993). In a research-based framework, Epstein et al. (2002) suggested six types of involvement to help parents participate in ways that meet student needs and family schedules. Two key types of involvement included in these six are creating two-way communication and involving families with their children in academic learning at home.

Recognizing the critical need for parent-teacher communication, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) requires that schools communicate with all families and involve them in ways that enhance students' success (Lewis, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Unfortunately, teacher education efforts are often insufficient to fully prepare beginning teachers for home-school communication, and this continues as a need area for many practicing teachers, as well (Fredericks & Rasinski, 1990; Stevens & Tollafield, 2003). Thus, new teachers entering classrooms must understand the importance of home-school communication and should have opportunities for actual conversations or connections with parents under the guidance of faculty responsible for their professional preparation.

Common examples of home-school interactions include notes and phone calls, newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, home visits, weekly folders, dialogue journals, and/or open house nights (Baskwill, 1996; Bohler, Eichenlaub, & Litteken, 1996; Farris, Fuhler, & Walther, 2004; Flood & Lapp, 1989; Fredericks & Rasinski, 1990). To address barriers of time and schedules, e-mail and Web-based communications have emerged as viable options to increase parent-teacher interaction and provide school–based information in a timely and consistent manner. In fact, in many communities, communication via e-mail has become commonplace (Bauch, 1989; Zisow, 2002).

School and classroom Web sites promote and maintain home-teacher communication by informing parents and community members of school and classroom activities (Bigalow, 2003; Solomon & Andres, 1998). In addition, homework hotlines and online student management portals extend opportunities for families to stay linked to classroom requirements and resources (Ammann, 2001; Fish, 2003; Zisow, 2002).

Electronic portfolios offer a unique and contemporary approach to help inform parents of children's efforts, progress, and achievement over time. Electronic portfolios can contain digital artifacts that capture children's voices in unique ways (Barrett, 1998, 2000; Harris & Reifel, 2002). Electronic portfolios also offer a storage advantage and can make children's work portable and accessible (Barrett, 2000; Diehm, 2004; Havens, 2003).

Typically, parents find it difficult to get information from their uncommunicative children about what happened during school (Beverly, 2003; Kasprowicz, 2002). Instead, parents are seeking other methods like school Web sites and portals to obtain that information. According to the 2004 Nielsen/NetRatings survey, 74.9% of U. S. households with a phone line have access to the Internet (Web Site Optimization, LLC, 2004). Parents with access are beginning to rely more on these online sites for daily updates about their child's grades, attendance, and homework (Fusco, 2004; Meyer, 2000; Weinstein, 2005). These online communication mechanisms are more convenient for parents, as they do not have to interrupt their workday to phone a teacher or attend a conference (Beverly, 2003).

This article describes how parent-teacher communication might be enhanced using a Web-based system that manages student reading artifacts along with teacher insight and explanation. Parents are requesting additional access to more evidence of their child's progress, so this approach provides specific artifacts documenting academic progress, not just a reported grade or a homework assignment summary.

In order to address some of these issues, a tutoring program for young readers focused on utilizing technology to communicate a child's literacy growth with parents. Specifically, this article describes the parent communication component within a graduate-level tutoring course in reading. Included is the Web-based approach one tutor used to communicate with the family whose child was enrolled in a university-based, tutoring program.

First, the requirements of the tutoring course and its relationship to the Reading Improvement Clinic are described. Next, the parent-tutor communication assignments completed in the course by all tutors are explained. In this section, artifacts prepared by one tutor and posted for parents using a Web-based environment are presented for each assignment. Finally, observations and recommendations concerning technology-based family communication and the plans for a research study that evolved are shared.

The Reading Improvement Clinic Experience

At this Midwestern, public university, students enroll in CI 588 Supervised Tutoring in Reading (three credits) directly after student teaching and licensure or during their graduate program in literacy. Paired with a companion course, CI 552 Diagnosis and Correction, the enrolled students are typically completing Department of Education requirements for a Title I reading position or meeting a school district's demands for additional reading coursework.

The CI 588 class time (seven 4-hour Saturday sessions throughout the semester) includes experiences with informal literacy diagnostic procedures to approximate a child's instructional range, as well as tutoring strategies to address children's literacy growth. Area families of children in grades 1 through 8 apply for one-on-one tutoring in the Reading Improvement Clinic, and each CI 588 student engages in 25 hours of tutoring an assigned child with literacy needs.

To accommodate the variety of schedules, each tutor/child pair arranges the tutoring days, times, and location, with each family responsible for that child's transportation. Family and tutor schedules determine the biweekly tutoring schedule. For example, some tutoring pairs meet Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 4:00-5:00 in scheduled campus tutoring rooms; another pair might meet Wednesday early evening and Saturday afternoon in a study booth at the local public library.

The seven 4-hour Saturday sessions, distributed throughout the semester, are supplemented by WebCT communication requirements of each tutor. That is, CI 588 students use an instructor-tutor private forum to post their tutoring plans for the upcoming week and to post their reflection after each tutoring session. This private forum gives the instructor a window into each tutor's processing, successes, and concerns. The biweekly reflections also allow the instructor to respond to the unique instructional materials, strategies, and challenges that each tutor encounters. During the class meetings held throughout the semester, tutors share successes and concerns in two ways. Whole class discussions address general concerns, and the instructor provides examples

of strategies and resources for tutors to consider. Students also move to grade-like/instructional range-like small groups to share materials and approaches.

During the initial CI 588 class, students are reminded that the semester will extend and refine the following three "growth lines":

1. With the tutor's careful planning, material selection, and teaching during the one-on-one tutoring, the literacy strategies of the assigned child will be enhanced (Baker, Gersten, & Keating, 2000; Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, 1982; Fitzgerald, 2001; Glass, Cahen, Smith, & Filby, 1982; Juel, 1996; Wasik & Slavin, 1993).
2. With careful observation, reflection, and tutoring modifications based on their observations, tutors each will better understand literacy development and their own teaching strengths and growth areas (Boyd, Boll, Brawner, & Villaume, 1998; Brunner, 1994; Furlong, & Maynard, 1995; Henderson, 1989; Kagen, 1992).
3. The required family communication component of the course ensures that parents will acquire an enhanced understanding of their child's literacy strengths and need areas, as well as exposure to resources and activities for family literacy reinforcement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2002; Klassen-Endrizzi, 2000; Stevens & Tollafield, 2003).

Conversations during class meetings reinforce how the child, the family, and the tutor are each impacted by the contents of the tutoring sessions. The next section describes the parent communication required of each tutor and gives Web-based examples one tutor used to report a child's literacy progress to the family.
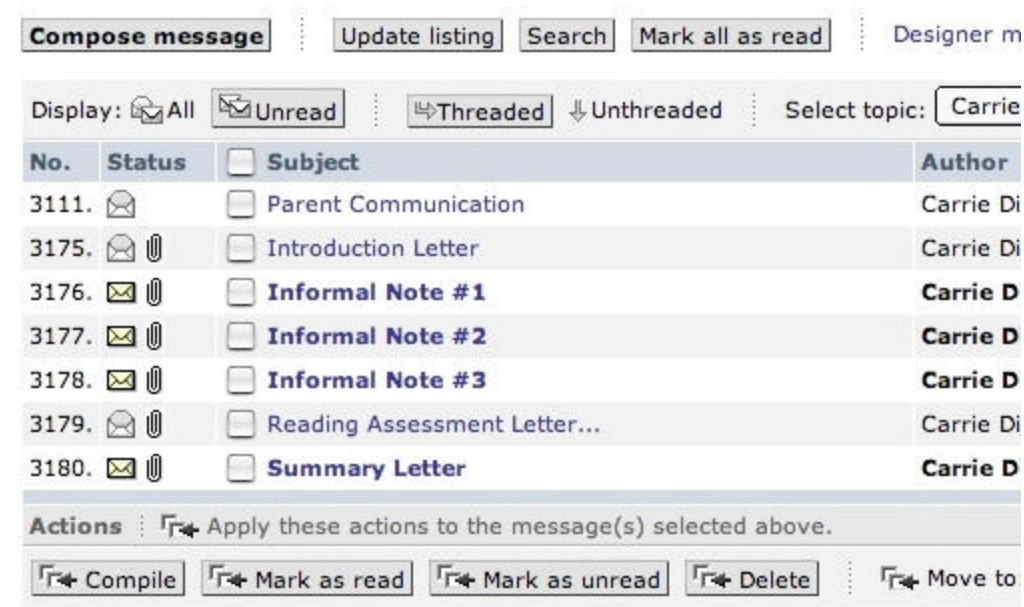
Parent-Tutor Communication

Sharing information with the family permeates the tutoring experience, beginning with an initial phone conversation and culminating in a parent-tutor conference when the tutor shares a portfolio with artifacts from the semester. Table 1 at the end of this article provides an overview for each required family communication component, as well as the objectives and minimal requirements for each contact.

For each type of family communication the instructor provides minimal requirements, samples from past semesters, and provisions for peer review of the communication components during class meetings. These typically have been paper samples that were either mailed, e-mailed, or hand-delivered to the parent. It became obvious to the instructor that a secure, Web-based technology system could easily be used to help facilitate the communication and sharing of this information between the parents and tutor.

During spring 2004 the instructor asked for a volunteer to explore the possibility of using the class WebCT site to share tutoring information with the family. A class member with extensive undergraduate technology experience (hereafter referred to as the "volunteer tutor") enthusiastically agreed to participate (Thompson, Schmidt, & Davis, 2003).

Since WebCT is a password-protected environment that is safe for sensitive communication, we established a private WebCT forum (tutor, parents, and instructor access) to explore posting communication, audio files of the child's reading, and video segments of a tutoring lesson. The examples that follow demonstrate how the volunteer tutor utilized a WebCT environment for communicating with the child's family after verifying their access to high speed Internet. Figure 1 illustrates the required family communication components posted online by the volunteer tutor.

Figure 1. *Written communication posted online by volunteer tutor.*

Letter of Introduction

During an initial pretutoring telephone conversation with parents, all tutors obtained information about their assigned child's interests, general health, attitudes toward literacy tasks, and academic strengths and needs. All tutors followed this conversation with a letter of introduction to the family. In this sample letter of introduction, posted on WebCT, the volunteer tutor included personal information, as well as a reminder of the tutoring times and location (see Appendix A, Letter of Introduction). Posted on the site by the volunteer tutor, family members were able to revisit the contents and track the entire semester of communication with the tutor.

Informal Notes

Throughout the semester, tutors may have personal parent contact and share highlights when the child is dropped off/picked up for tutoring sessions. The informal tutoring notes required of all tutors serve to reinforce the type of written home communication many schools expect of teachers. By requiring updated notes during the course, tutors can hone their informal communication skills, and the course instructor can gain additional insight into tutoring activities. In these notes home, each tutor is required to describe the child's overall behaviors and strengths and highlights of the tutoring sessions.

The volunteer tutor's first informal note to the family posted on WebCT described the child's general literacy attitudes, work habits, and the initial tutoring activities (see Appendix B, Informal Note 1). Informal notes 2 (see Appendix C, Informal Note 2) and 3 (see Appendix D, Informal Note 3) continued to highlight tutoring activities and materials with an emphasis on the child's successes and progress in goal areas.

Reading Assessment Letter

During the initial campus class sessions, instruction focused on informal literacy assessments with video samples, discussion, and peer-practice. All tutors then administered literacy assessments during the initial three meetings with the child they were tutoring. Assessments typically included an informal reading inventory, interest and attitude inventories, a student think aloud, a writing sample, and if needed, a decoding assessment. Since students in this class do not usually have experience in summarizing assessment results, the instructor previewed and provided feedback for each Reading Assessment Letter before it was shared with the family.

Using assessment data gathered during the first three sessions, the volunteer tutor's letter to the child's family, posted on WebCT, described each informal assessment task and the child's performance on the tasks. She included the child's general literacy behaviors during assessment, listed two tutoring goals, and indicated how she planned to address the child's interests within an identified instructional range of reading materials (see Appendix E, Reading Assessment Letter).

Tutoring Summary Report

During one of the last campus class meetings, all tutors read samples of Tutoring Summary Reports from previous semesters. This summary report provides a general tutoring overview written for the family. Because students generally lack experience in writing a summary of a semester of experience, the instructor previewed and provided suggestions for each student's Tutoring Summary Report before it was shared with the family during the Parent Tutor Conference.

The Tutoring Summary Report posted by the volunteer tutor for the parents described how the child's interests were addressed, how the tutor motivated the child, titles of two or three of the child's favorite books during tutoring, and the two tutoring goal areas for which the tutor planned. A section of the report described one successful literature lesson, an explanation of how vocabulary was monitored and reinforced, and an explanation of how the child's comprehension growth was guided. Another section included a list of at least three direct/explicit instruction lessons and a description of how the lesson areas were identified and then reinforced. Finally, the volunteer tutor thanked the family, encouraged home literacy activities, and suggested at least two books and two Web sites for home use with the child (see Appendix F, Tutoring Summary Report).

Tutoring Portfolio

For all tutors in the class, a portfolio, created by the child and the tutor during the course, highlighted their semester of work together. The tutoring portfolio is a reflective compilation of the child's work and documents the child's strengths and growth areas (Tancock, 1996). For the past decade, the Tutoring Portfolio has taken the form of a three-ring binder with artifacts and captions in plastic sleeves.

Instead of using the standard format, the volunteer tutor posted the portfolio contents into the WebCT forum so the child's parents could access the contents online (see Figure 2). The portfolio contained the tutoring goals, a list of selections read during the sessions, evidence of the child's vocabulary growth, and suggestions of additional book titles and Web sites for home use. The instructor required that all tutors organize artifacts in the portfolio by goal areas.

The volunteer tutor had established goal areas of enhanced comprehension and enhanced writing for the child she was tutoring. As indicated in the example in Figure 3,

she addressed the comprehension goal mainly through a series of literature lessons. The child's writing progress was documented by the volunteer tutor through a variety of his writing activities, most of which were extensions of literature used during the tutoring sessions (see Figure 4).
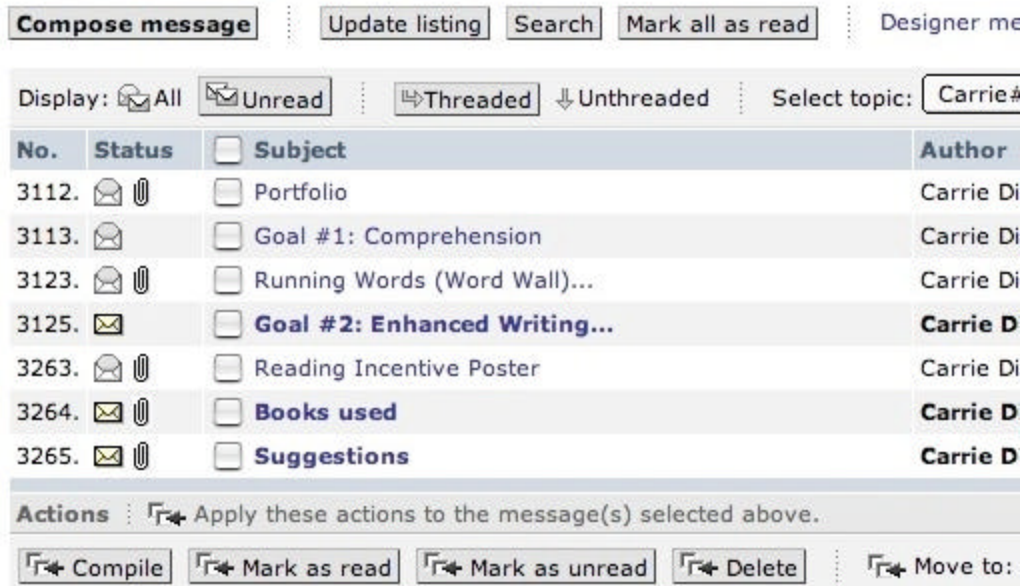
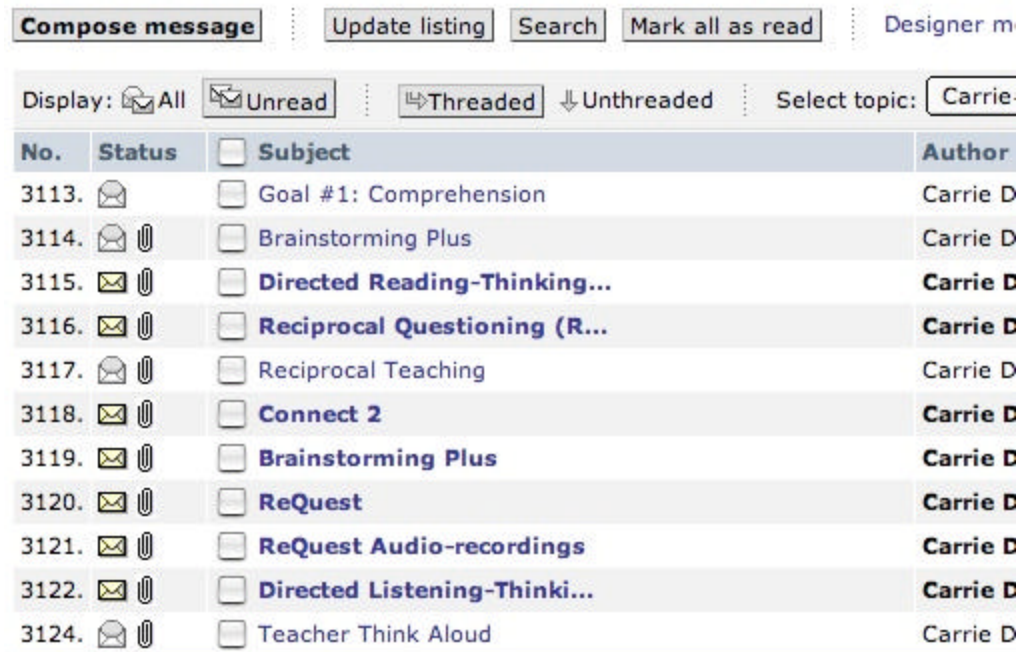

Figure 2. *Tutoring portfolio contents.*

Figure 3. *Tutoring portfolio comprehension goal artifacts.*

Figure 4. *Tutoring portfolio writing goal artifacts.*

Artifacts accumulated during the tutoring sessions formed the main contents of the portfolio, resulting in a "tutoring story" that was jointly created and jointly owned. The tutoring artifacts, organized by goal areas, were each to be accompanied by a caption that consisted of the following:

- The goal area (e.g., Comprehension, Fluency, Word Identification).
- A brief description of the context that resulted in the artifact.
- The tutor's interpretation.

Each caption had to be error-free and written for a family audience. A minimum of four captions were also to include the child's comments. As a result, both the child's voice and the tutor's voice were shared (as in Flood & Lapp, 1989; Harris & Reifel, 2002).

In the instructor's experience, writing the captions is challenging for most tutors. They often have difficulty describing the activity without jargon. That is, a tutor's description might initially read, "During one session I created a DR-TA for a short story," and the instructor has the student edit to briefly describe a DR-TA lesson.

Often, it is a challenge for tutors to word the interpretation section so that it helps parents appreciate the child's strengths. A tutor's initial interpretation section on the caption might read, "Alex did a good job answering the questions." Here, the instructor must remind tutors to use phrasing like, "Notice how Alex was able to...." or "I was especially impressed with his ability to..." or "Even though this seems to still be challenging for Alex, notice how he is improving in his ability to..." In the standard three-ring binder and plastic sleeve portfolio, a captioned audiotape of the child reading or a printed copy of her KidPix story characterized the extent to which technology was a part of the tutoring portfolio. However, sharing the artifacts in a Web site environment provided a more powerful venue to showcase the child's literacy strengths and growth areas.

One distinct advantage of an online portfolio was the volunteer tutor's ability to post video and audio from the tutoring sessions. Since WebCT easily accepts audio, the volunteer tutor selected a portion of this real-time documentation of a Language Experience Sequence to share online with the family (see Audio 1). Figure 5 shows the caption that accompanied this artifact. The caption presented the context and helped guide the family in focusing on the child's strengths.

Goal Areas: Writing & Comprehension
Activity Description: Alex used the pictures in the book <u>Four Hungry Kittens</u> by Emily Arnold <u>McCully</u> to dictate a story. Before he told his story, we went through the book and discussed the pictures. While he dictated a story from the pictures, I typed what he was saying. He then read the story he had composed, highlighted words that were important to the story and explained why. He practiced reading his creation silently and orally before creating this recording. As an ending to the activity, we completed a character perspective chart about his story by listing the main character, setting, problem, the main character's goal and what was done to solve the problem.
Comments: Notice that Alex's story includes the elements of a story (characters, setting, problem and steps to a resolution). He was also able to create complete sentences with no prompting. I was impressed with his ability to formulate the story as he went and I had a hard time typing as fast as he was dictating his story. His ability to "read" into the pictures to create a story really shows in his dictated story. Notice how fluent his reading has become.

Figure 5. *Caption for audio artifact included in online portfolio.*

The volunteer tutor also selected to include a video artifact in the online portfolio to demonstrate the child's writing progress. It is important to note that after approximately six tutoring sessions, all tutors have their child's goal areas identified and are beginning to determine appropriate instructional strategies to use. During one class session we focused on direct/explicit instruction by reviewing the research base, and the rationale and components of direct/explicit instruction and we analyzed video samples of lesson plans from previous semesters.

Each tutor was required to digital videotape one of three direct instruction lessons designed to address the child's needs. Students self-evaluated their videos for strengths and growth areas of pacing, teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent practice.

The volunteer tutor selected a video portion of her direct instruction lesson in writing to share online with the family (see Video 1). An accompanying caption presented the rationale for this lesson and once again guided the family in focusing on the child's strengths (see Figure 6).

Goal Area: Writing

Activity Description: After discussing a description of Alex's house, we read two different paragraphs. One paragraph had few details and the other had many details. We discussed with which one we could see a picture in our minds and which one was more interesting. Alex was then given his own brief paragraph and asked to add details to make it more interesting. We finished the session with Alex creating his own paragraph from a picture and adding details to make it interesting.
Comments: Alex has an extensive imagination and was able to tell me exactly what he was "seeing" in his mind when the paragraphs were read. He was even able to add his own details to the first set of paragraphs. His own paragraphs included quite a few details, however I did have to prompt him to think of more details for each paragraph he wrote. I was impressed with his ability to think of an example to explain what happens when details are added to a paragraph or a story.
Alex's Comments: "I wrote a cool paragraph."

Figure 6. *Caption for video artifact included in online portfolio.*

The volunteer tutor used the online environment throughout the semester to share assessment results, informal tutoring updates, and artifacts with captions of the child's work in identified goal areas, as well as audio and video segments from lessons. These elements formed the basis for discussion during an end of semester parent-tutor conference.

Parent-Tutor Conference

As indicated earlier, a parent-tutor conference is the culminating communication experience. The conference is intended to focus on positive aspects of the child's learning, the child's literacy affect, and how the family can best help (Youngs, 2002). In preparation, the students have viewed video segments of a parent conference from previous semesters. Video 2 provides excerpts from a conference that tutors view in preparation for their own parent conference. These video segments are followed by a "practice" parent-tutor conference in class, during which tutor pairs share their child's portfolio in a mock conference with a colleague role-playing the parent. This not only serves as pacing, phrasing, and content practice for each tutor's "real" parent-tutor conference, but it also gives colleagues an opportunity to appreciate another's tutoring activities and successes.

Most graduate students report feeling less anxious during the "real" conference after an opportunity to practice with a peer. Understandably, beginning teachers all reported observing but never leading parent-teacher conferences during student teaching.

As a result of the volunteer tutor's efforts in communicating with parents via WebCT, we envision the Video 2 sample as a parent-tutor conference at a computer screen reviewing online tutoring artifacts in lieu of the three-ring binder with plastic sleeves approach. Embedded in the concluding section of this article we share plans for a study to explore a broader use of online parent communication during tutoring.

Reactions, Observations, and Future Directions

The preceding section of this article illustrated how one tutor used an online environment to communicate a child's literacy progress with parents during a university-based Reading Improvement Clinic. Several advantages were realized as a result of using this online environment to facilitate communicatio n. It served as an example of technology's potential to enhance communication between school and home and guided these authors in planning a process to study the impact of online parent communication during the upcoming tutoring class. In preparation for o ur upcoming study, the application forms for tutoring have been modified so that parents' applications indicate their computer and high speed Internet access: home, school, or public library.

We anticipate that at least half of the families applying for tutoring will have high-speed Internet access at home (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005), allowing several tutors to use a Web-based environment to facilitate parent-teacher communication, while other tutors would use a more traditional, hardcopy approach for communicating with parents.

We perceived definite advantages to a technology-based approach to parent-teacher communication. Posting examples to a dedicated online site was completed easily and successfully with scant ancillary technology needed. It is important to note that the volunteer tutor had extensive experience with digital video and was comfortable with posting artifacts to an online environment. We also anticipate, however, that most students enrolled will have used these processes earlier during a required undergraduate technology course. We also determined that modeling and instruction sheets would adequately review these video, audio, and posting processes that tutors will need. Digital audio recorders and scanners are readily available in the department for tutoring use, so tutors will be able to create audio and graphic files to post for parents with little effort.

The WebCT site is password secure and private, offering an important security advantage. A school-sponsored web site could be organized to offer the same confidentiality, so posting communication during this class will serve to further prepare tutors for future professional practice (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). We determined that parents would need only a set of simple instructions to successfully log in as a registered WebCT guest and then into the private forum to access their child's tutoring information and artifacts. This type of access for families is becoming increasingly popular with the development of sophisticated school online student management systems and portals (Fusco, 2004; Meyer, 2000; Weinstein, 2005).

The volunteer tutor was enthusiastic about the advantages of an online approach to sharing information and the child's work. However, she reported that when planning for tutoring she had a tendency to more carefully consider artifacts from the lessons that could be posted online than she would have normally. She commented, "For some lessons

I would probably supplement his oral responses with additional writing so parents could appreciate his thoughtful reactions to a story." And "I found myself thinking, 'This would make a great photo to post for the parents.'" This will be an interesting attitudinal factor to explore during our proposed study.

The volunteer tutor also indicated that the child could have been involved in posting the artifacts, but tutoring time (60 minutes per session) and the home tutoring location posed limitations to the child's actual technology involvement. She reported that during their TechCo undergraduate field experiences (Thompson et al., 2003) she had observed how adept children became with online technology, thus supporting previous findings on children's Internet abilities (Barrett, 1998; Barrett, 2000; Harris & Reifel, 2002). This will be a logistical facet to explore during our study next semester.

This experience emphasized the advantages of sharing a child's work with parents in a timely, up-to-date manner (Beverly, 2003; Kasprowicz, 2002), rather than waiting for the end of term parent conference as we have done in the past. On a practical note, the volunteer tutor thought that posting artifacts online with a caption on a regular basis would help avoid an end-of-tutoring "crunch." Typically, despite in-class practice, periodic submission of captions to the instructor, and instructor reminders, tutors often wait to create captions for a majority of the artifacts until shortly before the portfolio is due. Consequently, students are a bit overwhelmed at the time it takes to write a careful description of the context that resulted in the artifact and the tutor interpretation.

Interestingly, even though she had her own professional portfolio online, the volunteer tutor was still a bit hesitant with the concept of sharing an electronic portfolio during the parent-tutor conference held at the end of the tutoring experience. She tended to prefer the "three-ring binder" approach for the conference. She indicated that it was very, very powerful for the parent to have this child's actual creations "right there" as highlights of the child's progress. The student wondered if sharing in an online format would be as effective. Throughout the semester we contemplated the effectiveness, the efficiency, and the educational merits of the online approach to parent-tutor communication. This will be one of the major areas to explore during our study.

One valuable lesson learned was that since many asynchronous, online forums operate in a linear fashion without the opportunity to move and reorganize postings, each forum for sharing with parents required preplanning. That is, for the spring semester study we have created a posting template for the students who would use this approach with families during the tutoring experience.

Informally, we considered that the advantages of using online postings seemed most appropriate for during-tutoring communication rather than as a fully developed electronic portfolio approach. That electronic portfolio storage advantage and making children's work portable, accessible, and easily and widely distributed (Barrett, 2000; Diehm, 2004; Havens, 2003) is somewhat compromised by the very nature of some Web sites. That is, since allowing parents unlimited future access to WebCT is not practical, and the portfolio contents would need to be transferred to CD format for parents' long-term access. We anticipate that this will be a simple transfer task for tutors during the proposed study.

Also, by its very format, posting each communication piece and each artifact online poses potential communication problems that we have had to contemplate. Each WebCT posting includes the option for a reader "Reply." In reality, parents may reply, and a less-than-diligent tutor can miss and not respond to these replies, thereby negatively affecting the very family communication it is designed to enhance. That is, it may be difficult for a tutor to "manage" family replies to a posting. This will be included as one of the areas to explore during our study.

Interestingly, this experience raised questions about the extent to which new teachers have internalized technology use. Only one of the 24 students in the class volunteered to experiment with the online approach to family communication. Nineteen of the class members were new graduates of our teacher preparation program that includes a required, three-credit technology course in which students learn how to develop Web pages, digital video projects, and multimedia projects for classroom applications. Furthermore, faculty members infuse technology during methodology courses to reinforce the undergraduates' initial technology experience. This suggests that campus experience alone is not enough to create technology-minded teachers. The volunteer tutor had worked with teachers during field experiences and student teaching placements who regularly used technology with students and managed classroom Web sites.

None of the other new graduates or practicing teachers in the class had had experience with school-based Web sites. For them, home communication used the more traditional format like hand written notes and phone calls home, newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, home visits, weekly folders, dialogue journals, and open house nights (Baskwill, 1996; Bohler et al., 1996; Farris et al., 2004; Flood & Lapp, 1989; Fredericks & Rasinski, 1990). In addition, the volunteer tutor whose experience is shared in this article was one of only two students in the class who had created an electronic professional portfolio. This suggests that a technology-rich teacher preparation program may not always result in seamless educational application.

In summary, this article reported on how a new graduate in teacher preparation used an online environment to share artifacts from reading tutoring sessions with the child's family. Timely online communication reported initial assessment results, updated the parents on tutoring activities, and shared the child's comprehension and writing artifacts from the tutor's lessons. In addition, online video and audio clips allowed the parents to see and hear their child's performance.

The volunteer tutor emphasized that the advantages far outweigh any disadvantages when she shared: "The parents had instant and ongoing understanding of what we were doing during the sessions. They were also able to compare and contrast across activities with a single click of the mouse." The parent echoed this enthusiasm when she reported how she "...could even hear how his comprehension had increased along with his confidence as he read." The parent concluded that, "To see it all here, it's like...oh my gosh, he accomplished so much high quality work!"

A major focus of the spring semester study will be to elicit enhanced responses from all parents regarding the home communication component of the course, with special attention to the advantages and challenges while using technology to facilitate and enhance parent-tutor communication.

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Table 1

Types of Parent-Tutor Communication Components Required

Communication Type	Date	Objective	Minimal Requirements
Initial Phone Contact	Jan. 21	The tutor will make phone contact with the child's parent/guardian and gather information that includes, but is not necessarily limited to the items listed.	• days, time, location of tutoring • transportation arrangements • child's interest & attitude toward tutoring • health restrictions • treat/reward restrictions • procedures for absences • exchange all phone numbers
Letter of Introduction	Jan. 24	The tutor will create a letter of introduction to the family/child that includes, but is not necessarily limited to the information listed.	• days, time, location of sessions • tutoring dates • tutor's personal/professional information • preview of 1st tutoring session
Informal Note 1	Feb. 9	The tutor will create an informal note to the family describing the child's overall behaviors and highlights of past tutoring sessions.	• child-centered • positive tone, brief • parent audience is evident • technical jargon avoided
Reading Assessment Letter	Draft: Feb. 14 Final: Feb. 24	The tutor will write a letter that describes each informal assessment task, the child's performance on each task, an instructional range, and the initial, overall tutoring goals.	• describe child's general literacy behaviors • describe get acquainted activities • describe each informal assessment task and the child's performance on the task • list 2-3 tutoring goals, instructional range of reading materials, address child's interests

Informal Note 2	March 26	The tutor will create an informal note to the family describing the child's strengths and highlights of past tutoring sessions.	• child-centered • positive tone, brief • parent audience is evident • technical jargon avoided • reminder of spring break
Informal Note 3	April 16	The tutor will create an informal note to the family describing the child's strengths and highlights of past tutoring sessions.	• child-centered • positive tone, brief • parent audience is evident • technical jargon avoided • final tutoring date/parent conference
Tutoring Summary Report	Draft: April 30 Final: May 2	The tutor will create a Tutoring Summary Letter for the family that includes the information listed.	• describe child's overall tutoring attitude and work habits • provide overall program summary • procedures section • explicit instruction section • closing paragraph
Tutoring Portfolio for Parent-Tutor Conference	Draft: May 3 Final: May 7	Using the child's artifacts generated throughout the 25 sessions, the tutor (and the child) will create a Tutoring Portfolio for the family that includes the sections listed.	• tutoring goal statements • list of the selections read • evidence vocabulary growth • artifacts organized by goals • suggested book titles and web sites for home-use • copies of all required parent communication
Parent-Tutor Conference	May 10-12	The tutor will conduct a 30-minute parent-tutor conference that highlights the child's progress during the tutoring sessions.	• Parent-Tutor Conference

January 24, 2004

Dear Alex and family:

 My name is Carrie. You and I are going to have a lot of reading "fun" in the coming weeks together. I will be your reading tutor, and I am really excited to get started! I hope you are too!

 I just graduated in December from the university with a degree in Elementary Education. I am taking two more classes to finish my Reading Endorsement, which will let me help more boys and girls like you. Right now, besides working with you, I am substitute teaching at some of the schools in the area to gain more experience in the classroom.

 When I was your age, I lived in the country near a small town called Oakdale in the western part of the state. I have two younger brothers. Corey is the older of the two, and he is working at UPS. Cody is the younger one, and he's in seventh grade.

 What do I like to do? I like to spend time watching movies and playing air hockey with my husband, Ray. I also like to visit my Dad and my brothers whenever I get a chance. Reading is one of my favorite things to do, but I also like to talk on the phone with my friends.

 If your parents need to get a hold of me, my home phone number is (XXX) 222-2222 or my cell phone number is (XXX) 333-3333. Please have them contact me at anytime if there are questions or concerns to discuss. Also, if you happen to be sick on one of the days we are supposed to meet, I would appreciate it if your parents could get in touch with me.

 I look forward to working with you, Alex, every Monday and Wednesday afternoon at 4:30 p.m.!

Sincerely,
Carrie D.

February 9, 2004

Dear Parents:

 Alex and I have worked together for four tutoring sessions up to this point. These sessions have given us a chance to get to know each other a little more and to finish informal reading and writing assessments. These informal assessment results will aid me in selecting appropriate materials for us to read together.

 Alex seems willing and eager to complete the tasks asked of him. He also appears to be relaxed and motivated to read. He is also willing to make connections with the things we have read to things in his own life experiences. He has been a little reluctant to write independently however, and I will continue to observe and work with him in this area.

 Our first two sessions together consisted of the informal assessments. In the following two sessions, we were able to start working with reading and writing activities. During one session, Alex wrote all of the things he knew about wild horses, we read an article about wild horses, and then added to his list from what we learned in the article. We decided to write a letter to the Bureau of Land Management to see what programs are in place to continue to help wild horses in the American West. We hope to finish this letter on Monday and send it the following day.

 If at any time you have any questions regarding some of the activities, please feel free to contact me. I am looking forward to the continued opportunity to work with Alex. Thank you for allowing him to participate in our tutoring sessions.

Sincerely,
Carrie D.